

May 25, 2022

RE: Letter on behalf of James Fleming

Dear Mr. Moderator and fellow Town Meeting Members,

On behalf of James Fleming, a resident of Precinct #3, I respectfully submit his letter regarding Article #38.

With sincere thanks!

Lenard Diggins, Town Meeting Member, Precinct #3

Dear Mr. Moderator, Town Meeting Members.

I am a resident of Precinct 3 and I write to encourage you to support Article 38 at this year's town meeting.

I live in half of a two-family, which is rented as an apartment. It's 100 years old, worn in some places, and it lacks some conveniences, so we are paying below market rent -- we are in the "naturally affordable" category of housing. It provided a foothold to get into Arlington when we first moved here.

The biggest concern I've heard about Article 38 is related to teardowns -- that they would remove naturally affordable housing and make it harder for the average person to live here. I see the point -- we have teardowns and gut renovations in our neighborhood, and everything new is in the high end of the market and mostly unaffordable.

My apartment was once new construction. Built with central heating, it was a luxury at a time when many homes were either heated with stoves, fireplaces, or weren't heated at all. I bet it was at the high end of the market. Today, central heat isn't special, and the house shows its age. It's naturally affordable now because it hasn't been kept up-to-date. The same thing will happen to homes built new today -- in 40+ years, they might also be naturally affordable.

Under state law, there is no way to limit the size of a single family home. Renovations and tear downs which maximize the building size can be done by right, which is why we're seeing them happen. Those homes will permanently occupy the high end of the market -- with Belmont and Winchester as my evidence, there is no way a 3000+ home will ever be naturally affordable.

I am in favor of Article 38 because it allows the possibility of, instead of just one large home, creating two smaller homes, which, while likely bigger than what they're replacing, are nevertheless closer in size to the original home. Compared to a large single family, those two smaller units are more likely to eventually become naturally affordable. They also are less expensive than the single-family that would otherwise have been built -- it's clear to me that two new \$1M condos are each less expensive than one new \$2M home. But it's also clear to me that we cannot build new naturally affordable housing today -- new houses, like new cars, are expensive.

The best time to create naturally affordable housing was to build it brand new decades ago and let it age. The second best time is today. By building more, small units today, we are creating the possibility of naturally affordable housing for future generations, and preserving a modicum of economic diversity in our town today.

- James Fleming, Oxford St.